Letters to the Editor

The Day of Rest: An interreligious approach

Sir, The nameless Pharaoh of the Hebrew Scriptures has never ceased his demand for surplus labour. Recently, the Chairman of a multi-national corporate conglomerate demanded that Indians put in 90 hours' weeks' neglecting their families. His advice is that we stop 'staring' on Sundays at our spouses.

Both Hindus and Roman Catholics should protest this corporate work culture which reduces the human person to an automata without the need for self-reflection and renewal. As women and men in dialogue with each other, we as religious communities must see the Sabbath in the case of Christians as a day of rest which ultimately helps us in self-actualisation.

We Hindus have incorpo-rated Sundays as our day of renewal. The Unitarian Minister and Biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, shows how the Sabbath is countercultural and thus, necessary. What is at stake here is the very unit of our society --- the family unit. If we are expected to work on Sundays, instead of being pilgrims of Hope oriented towards the numinous, we will become Heideggerian 'dasein' who are merely death oriented. Our respective Faiths demand that we resist the workaholism of the nameless Pharaoh who once demanded the making of excess and unnecessary bricks from the Jewish people. To be signs against the times, both Hindus and Roman Catholics need to pause every week and slow down. Corporate culture fuelled by purely financial considerations, will otherwise destroy us as a nation.

We forget that religions are foundationally anti-establishment and defy the ways of the world. Instead of chasing money and material comfort, both Hinduism and Roman Catholicism teach us to seek God qua Brahman. Foremost to both our religions is the acknowledgement of the primacy of God; then all things else. To work 24*7, neglecting God and spiritual renewal is to be radically caught up within the webs of systemic greed.

Overwork demanded of employees; 24*7 rote-learning forced on children by coaching institutes are all to be resisted. These forms of new slavery demand resistance and what better place to begin this protest than by praying, meditating, reading and practising our sacred Scriptures. Neither is possible if we are to work 24*7 for 365 days. Quantitative measurements cannot ever replace the quality of work.

Examination scores; organisational appraisals and sales-targets were originally meant to be for self- improvement. Now they have become dreaded tools to bring misery to both children and adults. We, as partners in dialogue must sensitise our respective religious sojourners to this dehumanisation of both academics and work.

Yours truly,
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